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FROM IMPERIAL RECORDKEEPING TO DIGITAL ARCHIVAL GOVERNANCE: INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY, DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE, AND FRAGILITIES IN TURKISH CYPRIOT ARCHIVAL PRACTICE (1571-2004)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the institutional, administrative, material, and technological transformation of Turkish Cypriot archival practice from Ottoman rule to the period of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Drawing on Gokhan Sengor's master's thesis Ottoman to Present-Day Turkish Cypriot Archival Practice, the article re-theorizes the thesis material through contemporary archival science, records management, diplomatics, provenance, original order, the records life cycle, the records continuum, and digital archival governance. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative historical-documentary design. It analyses Ottoman-era sharia court registers, correspondence offices, registers, and waqf-related documentation; the British colonial registry system, court files, official gazettes, general orders, and administrative correspondence practices; post-1960 transitional administrations and institutional fragmentation; and the establishment, collections, legislation, staff training, preservation challenges, and early digitization initiatives of the National Archives and Research Department. The findings indicate that Turkish Cypriot archival practice is not merely a technical field concerned with the storage of documents, but a strategic memory regime closely related to sovereignty, institutional memory, the rule of law, cultural heritage, identity continuity, and administrative accountability. The article argues that the central problem lies in the absence of an integrated archival governance architecture extending from records creation to archival appraisal, from preservation environments to access policies, and from public information systems to secure electronic records. Consequently, the article proposes a seven-layer model of archival governance for Turkish Cypriot archival practice and argues that the National Archives should be repositioned not as a passive repository, but as a central information institution that sets standards, audits agencies, trains staff, preserves documentary heritage, and ensures access from the earliest stages of the records life cycle.

Keywords: turkish cypriot archival practice, national archives, records management, archival governance, sharia court registers, digital archives

1. INTRODUCTION

The archive is not merely a backward-looking memory storehouse within modern public administration; it is also an institutional infrastructure that enables the legality of administration, the traceability of decision-making processes, citizens' right of access to information, the continuity of cultural heritage, and the documentary reconstruction of social identity. Archival material simultaneously carries the administrative language, legal mentality, power structures, social

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relations, property regime, and everyday practices of the period in which it was produced. For this reason, the archival history of a society reveals not only where documents were preserved, but also how that society governed itself, what kinds of information it recognized as evidence, which records it deemed worthy of preservation, and which fields of memory it allowed to remain neglected. Turkish Cypriot archival practice constitutes a particularly important research field in this respect, because the island's administrative history passed through successive yet institutionally discontinuous regimes: the Ottoman provincial order, British colonial rule, the 1960 Republic, Turkish administrative bodies after 1963, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus after 1975, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus after 1983.

These continuities and ruptures directly shaped the fate of archival material. In Cyprus, record creation has never been a merely administrative act; it has also been a matter of sovereignty, belonging, and legal legitimacy. During the Ottoman period, sharia court registers, correspondence records, waqf documents, population registers, and financial ledgers constituted the core documentary carriers of the relationship between central and provincial administration. Under British rule, record production was reorganized according to the registry and filing logic of colonial bureaucracy; courts, police, the Chief Secretary's Office, commissionerates, land registry, education, and the press generated distinct documentary series. In the post-1960 period, the short-lived joint administrative structure of the Republic of Cyprus, the institutional separation that followed the events of 1963, records preserved in Turkish enclaves, provisional administrative bodies, and the new public order after 1974 both enriched and weakened archival integrity.

The scientific examination of Turkish Cypriot archival practice therefore requires attention to three interdependent levels. The first is historical: the administrative regimes under which records were created determine their meaning and principles of arrangement. The second is technical: the script system, paper, ink, physical form, file relationship, serial integrity, and preservation environment of each record must be understood if archival processing is to be conducted properly. The third is governmental: archives cannot be limited to arranging records from the past; they must establish standards from the moment a record is born within public institutions, supervise filing systems, determine retention schedules, legalize disposal procedures, and ensure the security of digital records. One of the strongest aspects of the thesis on which this article is based is its treatment of Turkish Cypriot archival practice at the intersection of these three levels. This article reconstructs that material through the terminology of contemporary archival science and translates it into the analytical framework expected of a journal article.

The central research problem is as follows: Through which continuities, ruptures, and fragilities have the institutional and recordkeeping traditions of Turkish Cypriot archival practice developed from the Ottoman period to the present, and how has this historical legacy been reflected in contemporary records management, archival legislation, preservation, access, and digitization policies? This problem is not merely descriptive. The aim is to redefine Turkish Cypriot archival practice not as a passive practice of document storage, but as a field of archival governance operating at the intersection of institutional memory, public administration, the rule of law, and cultural heritage.

The original contribution of the article lies in reading Turkish Cypriot archival history not simply as a sequence of periods, but as a series of transitions between documentary regimes. Ottoman records are examined through diplomatics and the tradition of sharia court registers; British- period records through filing, registry, and official publication systems; and the post-1960 administrative structure through crisis, fragmented institution-building, record transfer, the effort to establish archival bodies, and the need for legal regulation. In this way, the article reads archives not as silent repositories of the past, but as institutions central to social continuity, state capacity, identity protection, and the secure circulation of public information.

Theoretical Framework: Archive, Documentary Regime, and Institutional Memory

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1.1 Archival Evidence, Provenance, And Original Order

One of the fundamental principles of modern archival science is provenance: records must be evaluated without being detached from the institutional or personal context of their creation. A record gains archival value not only because of the information it contains, but because it was produced by a particular institution, under a particular authority, within a particular transaction, and as part of a particular record series. The principle of provenance protects the historical context of archival material; it transforms the document from an isolated text into part of an administrative and legal act. Closely related to this is the principle of original order, which holds that records should, as far as possible, be preserved in the arrangement established by their creating institution. File order, registration number, serial relationship, attachments, initials, classification logic, and institutional hierarchy are integral to documentary meaning.

For Turkish Cypriot archival practice, provenance and original order are critical. The island was governed by multiple regimes, each of which generated its own language of correspondence, legal system, filing method, and habits of record creation. Ottoman sharia court registers and British colonial court files may have been produced on the same island, but they do not belong to the same documentary regime. A sharia court register must be read within the legal, administrative, and social jurisdiction of the qadi court; a British colonial court file must be read within the procedural logic of the colonial judiciary. Without this distinction, the content of records may still be visible, but archival context is lost. In geographies such as Cyprus, where administrative sovereignty changed repeatedly, archival work is not merely classification; it is the art of deciphering the documentary language of successive governmental regimes.

The thesis emphasizes that knowledge of public administration structures and officeholders is indispensable for archival classification. This emphasis is the local expression of the principle of provenance. Without knowing the signatory's authority, institutional affiliation, date of production, administrative organization of the period, and registration system present on the record, sound classification is impossible. Turkish Cypriot archival practice therefore requires an interdisciplinary expertise situated between archival science, administrative history, legal history, and diplomatics.

Records life cycle, records continuum, and archival governance

The classical records life-cycle model assumes that a record passes through stages of creation, active use, semi-active storage, appraisal, transfer to archives, or disposal. This model tends to view the archive as the final destination of the record. By contrast, the records continuum approach argues that evidential, informational, institutional memory, and social memory values emerge simultaneously from the moment of creation. From this perspective, the archivist is not a specialist who intervenes only after records are transferred to an archival institution; the archivist must also participate from the beginning in the design of record creation standards, metadata fields, retention schedules, access policies, and digital security mechanisms.

One of the central problems of Turkish Cypriot archival practice is that the archive has long been perceived primarily as an institution that receives and stores material. Yet the thesis explicitly notes the need for a broadly authorized National Archives Board composed of administrative officers, clerks, personnel units, archival staff, lawyers, and financial officers who would intervene throughout the entire process from the birth to the death of the record. This approach corresponds closely to contemporary records management. Reducing unnecessary record production, determining the life span of a record at the stage of creation, avoiding the assumption that the expiry of a retention period automatically justifies disposal, and preserving records of enduring value are possible only through an integrated model of governance.

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The concept of archival governance is therefore central. Governance is not merely legal authority; it is the coordinated operation of standards, audit, inter-institutional coordination, human resources, technology, preservation infrastructure, access policy, information security, and ethical responsibility. Many current problems in Turkish Cypriot archival practice derive less from isolated technical deficiencies than from fragmentation within the governance architecture. The non-implementation of official correspondence rules, the variation of filing systems across agencies, the independent development of public information systems, insufficient standardization of disposal procedures, and the failure to treat electronic records within an integrated institutional framework are all indicators of this fragmentation.

Diplomatics and documentary materiality

Archival science is not limited to the intellectual classification of documents. The form, language, script, paper, ink, method of registration, initials, seal, attachments, and physical properties of a record are also part of archival meaning. Diplomatics analyses the authenticity, function, and legal character of records through their formal and structural elements. In Ottoman records, script type, the tughra, imperial decrees, warrants, orders, correspondence, waqf deeds,

sharia registrations, and ledger structures are central fields of diplomatic analysis. In the British period, registry numbers, file titles, minute sheets, modes of attachment, red or blue registration numbers, General Orders, and official gazettes served comparable evidential functions.

The thesis's separate discussion of writing systems, paper types, pens, ink, typewriters, and computers as carriers and producers of information is especially important. Archival preservation cannot be undertaken properly without knowledge of the physical and technological characteristics of records. Humidity, heat, light, insects, fire, theft, paper brittleness, ink bleeding, microfilm degradation, obsolescence of digital file formats, and risks associated with magnetic media require different preservation strategies. Archival work is therefore simultaneously an administrative science, a conservation science, and an information technology field.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a qualitative historical-documentary analysis. Its primary basis is Gokhan Sengor's master's thesis Ottoman to Present-Day Turkish Cypriot Archival Practice. The thesis offers a broad panorama of archival history under the headings of administrative forms and institutions, information carriers, materials used in record production, rules, official offices and archives, the National Archives and Research Department, and current problems. In this article, the thesis is not merely summarized; it is restructured through archival science concepts and transformed into the form of an academic research article.

The analytical strategy consists of four stages. First, a historical periodization was established: Ottoman administration, British colonial rule, the Republic of Cyprus, post-1963 Turkish administrations, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Second, the documentary regime of each period was identified, including the language of record creation, institutional structure, documentary forms, archival carriers, and preservation practices. Third, the foundation, location, staffing, collections, legal regulation, preservation, and access dimensions of the National Archives and Research Department were evaluated through the lens of archival governance. Fourth, current problems were discussed through records management and digital archival governance, leading to the proposal of an integrated model.

This study did not collect data from human participants and did not involve interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures. It is grounded in a published thesis text, publicly accessible historical sources, archival science literature, and theoretical analysis. It therefore does not constitute field research requiring ethics committee approval.

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Nevertheless, archival ethical concerns such as privacy, the protection of sensitive personal data, access limitations regarding court and population records, the safeguarding of cultural heritage, and the public interest are taken into consideration in the discussion.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 The Ottoman Documentary Regime: Sharia Court Registers, Ledgers, And Administrative Continuity

During the Ottoman period, archival production in Cyprus was shaped by provincial administration, qadi courts, waqf institutions, correspondence offices, financial records, and local administrative practices. After the conquest of Cyprus, the island was organized as a province; within the Nicosia-centered administrative order, beylerbeyis, sancakbeyis, qadis, naibs, treasurers, ledger officers, and council officials became the main actors of record creation. This structure shows that archival material emerged through both central-provincial relations and local legal transactions.

Sharia court registers are among the most valuable archival series of the Ottoman period. These volumes contain not only court proceedings but also waqf deeds, purchase and sale transactions, inheritance, estate and orphan records, price regulations, guild supervision, petitions, decrees, warrants, official orders, and copies of administrative correspondence. Sharia court registers are therefore not merely court records in the narrow sense; they are multilayered memory spaces of the legal, social, economic, and administrative life of society. Their value for Turkish Cypriot archival practice derives not only from their documentation of the Ottoman past, but also from their evidential record of Turkish presence on the island, local modes of governance, property relations, and the waqf system.

During the transition from Ottoman to British administration, some documents, ledgers, and drafts were reportedly transferred to the Imperial Archives. This indicates that the archival heritage of Cyprus was geographically fragmented as early as the 1878 transition. Some material was incorporated into the Istanbul-centered archival order, some remained on the island, while other records continued to exist in dispersed locations such as mosques, madrasas, masjids, waqf institutions, churches, monasteries, district offices, and private archives. This fragmentation shows that the problem of provenance in Turkish Cypriot archival practice is not only a matter of internal institutional order, but also of international and intercommunal archival distribution.

Another characteristic of the Ottoman documentary regime is the diversity of materials and scripts. Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, and Persian elements; different types of handwriting; ledger forms; waqf records; warrants; and the language of imperial decrees demand not only classification skills but also paleographic and diplomatic expertise. For this reason, Ottoman paleography training in Turkish Cypriot archival practice is not a luxury; it is a necessary infrastructure for making collections readable and usable.

Filing, registry, and institutional recordkeeping under British Colonial Rule

The transfer of the island to British administration in 1878 caused a sharp shift in archival production. The Ottoman documentary order, centered on sharia court registers and correspondence, was integrated into the British colonial bureaucratic system built on registry

practices, filing, minute sheets, official gazettes, general orders, administrative reports, and court files. British administration developed detailed bureaucratic rules for registering correspondence, assigning file titles and numbers, attaching enclosures, using minute sheets, and differentiating registration numbers by color. These rules are highly significant from the perspective of modern records management because they embody the principles of identifying a record at the moment of creation, maintaining file integrity, and ensuring administrative traceability.

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One of the most important legacies of the British-period recordkeeping regime is the court archive. The existence of Ottoman sharia courts continued for a time under the terms of the agreement, while consular courts and other judicial structures eventually gave way to new forms of judicial record production. Court files, Assize Court records, minute books, estate and orphan files, deed and stamp registers, legislation, and official gazette collections are documentary evidence not only of legal transactions but also of social relations, property structures, family organization, and public authority on the island.

The British period left a double archival legacy. On the one hand, filing and registry systems strengthened the transactional context of records; on the other hand, documents produced by colonial administration reflect not only how island communities represented themselves, but also how colonial authority viewed and categorized them. British-period records are therefore both rich sources and a colonial knowledge regime requiring critical reading. The archivist and the researcher must treat these records not simply as data, but also as knowledge objects produced through relations of power.

Official gazettes and general orders under British rule are of particular importance for understanding institutional operations. Administrative structures, staffing arrangements, correspondence procedures, court organization, press regulation, and public decisions can be traced through these publications. The preservation of official gazette series and British-period administrative documents is thus strategic not only for historical research but also for legal continuity and property-related questions.

Post-1960 Transitional periods: Institutional fragmentation and records security

The establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960 opened a new phase of record creation based on a joint state structure. However, the administrative separation of the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities after the events of 1963 made archival integrity fragile once again. The General Committee, the Provisional Turkish Administration of Cyprus, the Turkish Administration, the Autonomous Turkish Cypriot Administration, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus, and finally the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus produced successive forms of public administration within a short period. This creates significant difficulties in tracing record series: the same function continued under different administrative names; institutional titles and affiliations changed; documents were moved under crisis conditions to different buildings and storage rooms; some records remained in Turkish enclaves; others remained elsewhere or became inaccessible.

From an archival perspective, the defining problem of the post-1963 period is that records security ceased to be merely a matter of physical preservation and became a matter of social

existence and legal rights. Court files, land registers, population records, official decisions, education records, and institutional correspondence are documents that prove the rights, property, status, and historical presence of a community in a context of conflict and division. The loss of such documents therefore means not only the loss of information, but also the loss of rights and memory.

This period also explains why the idea of a National Archives emerged not merely as a cultural institution but as an existential necessity. The Turkish Cypriot community's effort to collect, preserve, arrange, and open its own records to research was the product not only of scholarly curiosity, but also of political uncertainty and the need for documentary security. Efforts to establish archival institutions therefore represent a critical intersection between collective memory and public administration.

The National Archives and Research Department: Foundation, collections, and institutionalization

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The foundation of the Turkish Cypriot National Archives became visible in the late 1960s through the demands of intellectuals and the initiatives of Rauf Raif Denktas. The 1971 proposal and subsequent work transformed the idea of an archive into a concrete institutional structure. Mustafa Hasim Altan's research in Turkey at the Prime Ministry Imperial Archives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, the Topkapi Palace Museum Archives, the Directorate General of Foundations Archives, and the Land Registry and Cadastre Archives of Old Registers shows that early National Archives work developed around Ottoman paleography, microfilm, and the acquisition of documentary copies. The thesis notes that 10,000 microfilmed documents were initially obtained, while later publications referred to 20,000. Even this discrepancy demonstrates that archival history itself requires critical documentary reading.

In its early years, the National Archives took steps to collect inactive records from public institutions and organizations. In 1973, the Turkish Communal Courts transferred sharia court registers, minute books, estate and orphan registers, deed and stamp registers, powers of attorney, correspondence, certificates, deposit and maintenance ledgers, official gazette collections, the Cyprus Blue Book, Dustur, Staff Lists, and various legal materials. This collection structure shows that the National Archives did not contain only political history documents, but also materials related to judicial, financial, administrative, social, educational, and press history.

The opening of the Turkish Cypriot National Archives and Research Centre on 18 June 1973 marked a critical threshold in the institutionalization of Turkish Cypriot documentary memory. The move to the Severis Building in 1975 and the creation of the National Archives Board show the institution's development in spatial and administrative terms. Yet, as the thesis indicates, the failure to operate these boards regularly and effectively, together with delays in legislative and regulatory work, shows clearly that archival governance is not completed by institutional inauguration alone.

The enactment of the National Archives and Research Department Law in 1990 and the amendments introduced in 1994 strengthened the legal foundation of archival institutionalization. Nevertheless, some definitions in the law, particularly those limiting material

to the post-1571 period, are open to debate. Ottoman interest in Cyprus and Anatolian-Cypriot relations predate 1571, and documents concerning Cyprus held in Ottoman archives need to be evaluated within a broader historical framework. When defining chronological boundaries in archival legislation, therefore, the history of documentary production and relationships should be considered alongside the political date of conquest.

Collection Structure: Multilingual, multi-regime, and multi-genre archival material

The collections of the National Archives and Research Department constitute the archival counterpart of Cyprus's multilingual and multi-regime history. Ottoman Turkish, Turkish, English, and Greek/Rum documents; ledgers; court files; official gazette series; maps; newspapers; photographs; manuscripts and printed works; microfilms; Council of Ministers proposals and decisions; land registers; well-permit files; population registers; and press summaries coexist within the institution. This diversity distinguishes Turkish Cypriot archival practice from standard monolingual national archive models. The archivist here cannot be merely an official who arranges files; the archivist must be a multidisciplinary specialist able to read Ottoman Turkish, understand the British colonial recordkeeping system, work with Greek/Rum material, interpret maps and land records, and command preservation and digitization knowledge.

One of the most striking features of the collection structure is the density of legal and administrative record series. Court files, sharia court registers, minute books, estate and orphan registers, powers of attorney, correspondence records, certificates, deposit and stamp registers allow the social and legal history of the Turkish Cypriot community to be studied at a micro level. These materials are fundamental sources not only for political history, but also for family history, women's and children's rights, inheritance practices, property relations, waqfs, guild organization, local

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economy, education, and everyday life.

Newspaper, official gazette, and press-summary collections are significant for the study of public discourse, propaganda, political mobilization, intercommunal relations, and the official language of the state. Maps, land registers, and well-permit files reveal the archival dimension of space. These records document not only the political history of the island, but also its topography, property regime, water resources, settlement patterns, and administrative spatialization.

Preservation, security, and material infrastructure

The preservation of archival material is not merely a matter of placing records on shelves or using file boxes. Paper is sensitive to humidity and temperature fluctuations; when humidity rises, paper expands, and when it dries, it contracts, weakening the fiber structure and making the record physically fragile. The thesis's detailed treatment of paper, pens, ink, inkwells, typewriters, and computers demonstrates how decisive documentary materiality is for archival preservation. Ottoman paper types, watermarked and non-watermarked examples, writing tools, and ink types all show that conservation decisions must be grounded in historical knowledge of materials.

The National Archives' work on buildings, storage rooms, insulation, map cabinets, binding workshops, insect and termite control, security walls, guard posts, and fire and theft precautions constitutes the invisible yet vital dimension of archival service. Archival security is not merely the prevention of document theft; it is also the protection of legal evidence, public memory, and historical rights. The example of files stolen from the Famagusta District Court demonstrates that a breach of archival security can directly affect judicial processes. The destruction or theft of land and court archives is powerful enough to transform historical claims to presence and ownership.

The problem of preservation has acquired new dimensions in the digital age. Microfilm provides a degree of security compared with analog originals, but it also requires its own storage conditions. Transfer to computer environments accelerates access, but without strategies for file formats, metadata, backup, digital integrity, access authorization, and long-term digital preservation, it cannot constitute a lasting solution. For this reason, digitization in Turkish Cypriot archival practice must be designed not as a scanning activity alone, but as an architecture of electronic records management and digital preservation.

Current Problems: Loss of rules, coordination deficit, and digital transformation

The section of the thesis devoted to current problems emphasizes a central issue: correspondence and filing rules created in earlier periods have increasingly been regarded as burdensome, authority has become ambiguous, and inter-institutional coordination has not been secured. As a result, rules have either not been applied or have been forgotten. This diagnosis summarizes the main crisis of Turkish Cypriot archival practice: the problem is not merely that old documents remain unclassified; it is that standards are insufficiently applied at the beginning of record creation. When record creation is not controlled, the archive becomes, at a later stage, a repository struggling with disorder.

Reactivating official correspondence rules, establishing diplomatic standards, implementing filing systems across the public sector, creating material standards, improving preservation environments, and preventing unnecessary record and form production are not merely technical recommendations; they are prerequisites for the rationalization of public administration. In this context, the thesis's references to Kamu-Net, electronic signatures, public information systems, and citizens' ability to follow administrative transactions electronically represent early local counterparts of today's e-government and digital archival governance debates.

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The public information system approach removes the archive from the role of a place where only past records are stored; it requires the information produced by public institutions to be managed securely, consistently, with proper authorization, and in accessible form. The parallel between information technology and the old Imperial Archives is meaningful here: although technology has changed, the basic duty remains the same: to preserve information securely, make it accessible to authorized users, and prevent unauthorized access. The institutional distance between archival work and information technology should therefore be reduced, and electronic records management must be designed in accordance with the principles of archival science.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Turkish Cypriot Archival Practice As A Memory Regime

The findings show that Turkish Cypriot archival practice cannot be understood as a merely technical profession concerned with the preservation and classification of records. It is a memory regime that enables the historical presence of the Turkish Cypriot community, the continuity of public institutions, the documentation of legal rights, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage. Ottoman qadi registers, British court files, official gazettes, land registers, waqf documents, Council of Ministers decisions, and newspaper collections carry not only the community's past, but also its present legitimacy through that past.

The de facto division of Cyprus in 1964 and 1974 increased the spatial and political fragility of archives. The fact that some records are located in Turkey, some in the United Kingdom, some in the area administered by the Greek Cypriot authorities, some in TRNC institutions, some in waqfs, and some in private archives transforms Turkish Cypriot archival practice into a multi- centered archival geography. Archival integrity cannot therefore be reduced to the aim of gathering all documents within a single building. It must also be pursued through the acquisition of copies, microfilm or digital surrogates, shared catalogues, reciprocal inventories, international cooperation, and metadata interoperability.

From passive custody to active records governance

The future of the National Archives does not depend only on receiving more documents or possessing larger storage facilities. The real issue is to establish a governance chain that begins at the moment a record is created. When public institutions determine their own correspondence and filing standards in independent and irregular ways, the material eventually transferred to the National Archives inevitably becomes disordered, incomplete, repetitive, and weakened in context. The National Archives should therefore not be merely the arranger of material that has already reached the repository; it should also be the institution that determines and supervises record creation standards within public agencies.

Three principles are required for this transformation. First, the retention plan must be determined at the moment of record creation. Each record has different administrative, legal, financial, historical, and cultural values; therefore, retention periods must be determined according to functional value rather than by the mere passage of time. Second, disposal must be subject to legal and archival supervision. The expiry of a retention period cannot automatically be treated as a sufficient reason for destruction. Third, electronic records must be managed differently from analog records but with equal archival seriousness. Without electronic signatures, metadata, version control, access logs, long-term digital preservation, and format migration policies, the security of electronic records cannot be ensured.

The problem of expertise in multilingual and multi-regime archives

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Turkish Cypriot archival practice involves multilingual collections containing Ottoman Turkish, Turkish, English, Greek/Rum, and in some cases Arabic and Persian elements. This condition makes staff training far broader than technical archival procedures. Archival personnel need continuous training in paleography, diplomatics, administrative history, legal history, basic conservation, digitization, cataloguing standards, metadata, and researcher services. Examples in the thesis - including National Archives staff receiving training in Turkey, cooperation with universities for internships and translation, and the transfer of Ottoman Turkish newspapers into digital environments - show that this need was recognized from an early stage.

Training, however, cannot be left to individual effort. A formal institutional training policy must be developed for Turkish Cypriot archival practice, and a permanent network of expertise should be established among universities, the National Archives, the Directorate of Foundations, courts, land registry institutions, libraries, and information technology units. Archival science is not a narrow profession dealing only with old documents; it is one of the basic infrastructures of the information society.

Access, ethics, and the public interest

One of the basic functions of archives is service to researchers; however, access is not an absolute or unlimited principle. Records concerning population, courts, health, family, property, personal data, and security must be governed by legal and ethical criteria. In this context, researcher services at the National Archives mean not only locating and presenting documents, but also managing access restrictions, copying rules, copyright and data-protection principles, personal privacy, and the public interest together.

In a politically sensitive and historically conflictual geography such as Cyprus, archival access is also important for intercommunal memory and historiography. Archives should not become ideological instruments that fix the past in a single voice; they should function as scientific institutions that protect the security, context, and accuracy of records. Archival openness does not mean irresponsible circulation of documents; it means contextualized, registered, ethical, and auditable access.

A seven-layer archival governance model for Turkish Cypriot archival practice

This study proposes a seven-layer governance model for the future of Turkish Cypriot archival practice. The first layer is legislative and jurisdictional clarity. The remit of the National Archives, the definition of archival material, the distinction between records of archival potential and archival records, disposal authority, institutional obligations to transfer records, and digital record standards should be clearly regulated. The second layer is record creation standards. Official correspondence rules, institutional coding systems, file plans, document numbering, attachment management, initialing and signature procedures, and electronic record metadata fields should be standardized across the public sector.

The third layer is retention and appraisal planning. Function-based retention schedules should be prepared for every institution, and administrative, financial, legal, and historical values must be

clearly distinguished. The fourth layer is preservation and security. Archival buildings should be equipped with climate control, fire prevention, theft prevention, insect control, flood and earthquake precautions, digital backup, and disaster recovery plans. The fifth layer is digital archives and electronic records management. Kamu-Net, electronic signatures, electronic records management systems, long-term digital preservation, format migration, checksums, access logs, and authorization policies must be implemented in accordance with archival principles.

The sixth layer is human resources and training. Continuous education should be provided in Ottoman paleography, the British colonial recordkeeping system, basic Greek/Rum reading skills, diplomatics, conservation, metadata,

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digitization, and researcher services. The seventh layer is access and social use. The archive should become an open information institution serving not only academics, but also lawyers, public institutions, family historians, journalists, cultural organizations, and citizens within ethical boundaries.

Table 1. Proposed Seven-Layer Governance Model for Turkish Cypriot Archival Practice

Layer	Primary Purpose	Implementation Instrument	Expected Outcome
1. Legislation and authority	Clarify archival material, records of archival potential, disposal, and transfer authority	National Archives Law, by-laws, regulations, and institutional protocols	Reduced jurisdictional conflict and stronger legal security
2. Record creation standard	Identify the record from the moment of creation	Official correspondence rules, institutional code, file plan, metadata	Regular transfer and faster access
3. Retention and appraisal	Separate unnecessary record accumulation from material of enduring value	Function-based retention schedules and disposal commissions	Reduced storage burden and preservation of archival value
4. Preservation and security	Maintain the physical and digital integrity of records	Climate control, fire/insect/theft protection, backups, and disaster planning	Lower risk of loss and deterioration
5. Digital archive	Ensure long-term security of electronic records	Electronic signature, ERMS, checksum, format migration, access logs	Digital continuity and auditability
6. Human resources	Manage multilingual and multi- regime collections with expertise	Training in paleography, diplomatics, preservation, metadata, and access	Increased professional capacity
7. Access and social use	Transform the archive into a public-interest information institution	Researcher policy, personal data protection, copying and use rules	Ethical, reliable, and sustainable access

5. CONCLUSION

This article has reconsidered the historical development of Turkish Cypriot archival practice from the Ottoman period to the present through the concepts of contemporary archival science. Its central conclusion is that Turkish Cypriot archival practice is not merely a technical matter concerning the preservation of old records; it is a strategic field for the rationalization of public administration, the preservation of legal evidence, the continuity of cultural heritage, the institutionalization of social memory, and the protection of information security in the digital

age. Ottoman sharia court registers and ledgers, British registry and court files, records of post-1960 transitional administrations, and the institutional collections of the National Archives document the historical presence of the Turkish Cypriot community in a multilayered way.

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The study shows that the most significant problem in Turkish Cypriot archival practice is not simply a shortage of material or delays in classification. The fundamental problem is the insufficient institutionalization of an integrated records management system extending from record creation to archival preservation. The non-implementation of correspondence rules, the lack of standardized filing systems, weak inter-institutional coordination, irregular record transfer, poorly supervised disposal procedures, fragmentation in digital records management, and deficiencies in preservation infrastructure are all symptoms of this problem.

The future role of the National Archives and Research Department should be to move from passive storage toward active archival governance. The Department should set standards for public agencies, supervise file plans, guide retention and disposal processes, provide training, participate in digital records management policies, ensure the physical and digital security of archival material, and offer ethical access to researchers. This transformation is not the responsibility of archivists alone; it is a shared responsibility of public administrators, lawyers, information technology specialists, academics, and society.

The most urgent need for Turkish Cypriot archival practice is to remove the archive from the back room of the past and place it at the center of public administration. When a society preserves its records, it does not merely demonstrate affection for its past; it builds the institutional intelligence through which it can prove itself, account for itself, learn, and reconstruct itself in the future. The archive is therefore not only the historian's resource; in Turkish Cypriot society it is the shared memory of the state, the citizen, the law, and culture.

Limitations and future research

The main limitation of this study is that it is a historical-documentary and theoretical article developed from a single master's thesis. It does not include new field research, a current institutional inventory, or interviews with archival personnel. Since the thesis was completed in 2004, post-2004 digitization, e-government applications, legislative changes, and the current institutional status of the National Archives require separate research.

Four lines of future research are suggested. First, a comprehensive inventory study should evaluate the current state of the National Archives and Research Department's collections in terms of fonds, series, language, date range, physical condition, and level of access. Second, case studies should be conducted on fonds such as court, land registry, waqf, education, and press archives. Third, Turkish Cypriot archival practice should be compared with current international standards in relation to digital preservation, electronic records management, and electronic signatures. Fourth, the divided archival geography of Cyprus should be transformed into a multi- centered research program covering the distribution of documents across Turkey, the United Kingdom, the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, and the TRNC.

Ethics statement, conflict of interest, and data use

Ethics Committee Statement: This study is a theoretical and documentary analysis based on a published thesis, publicly accessible historical sources, and academic literature. Since it does not involve a new data collection process with human participants, it does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest related to this study.

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